

Everybody is a star

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Disconaut AAA - Association of Autonomous Astronauts

Disconauts are go!

Forget Apollo, NASA and the Space Shuttle.....the most exciting explorations of space in the last 30 years have been carried out through music.

Emerging on the radical fringes of jazz in the 1950s, Sun Ra (1914-1993) and his Intergalactic Research Arkestra (as his band was later known) set the space vibe in motion with interstellar explorations like "Space Jazz Reverie", "Love in Outer Space", "Disco 3000" and the film "Space is the place".

Described by one critic as a "comic strip version of Sun Ra", George Clinton developed his own funky cosmic Afronaut mythology in the 1970s through his work with Funkadelic and Parliament. For instance the album "Mothership Connection" (1975) is based around the concept of aliens visiting earth to take the funk back to their own planet.

Sun Ra and Clinton's work can be read as a sort of sci-fi take on Marcus Garvey. While Garvey dreamt of Black Star Liners shipping black people from slavery across the ocean to an African utopia, they leave the planet behind altogether.

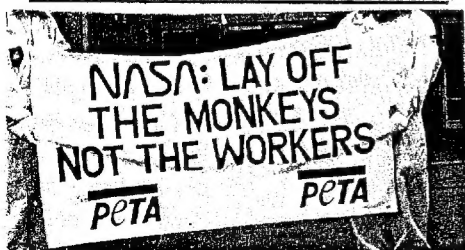
Space continued to be a preoccupation during the 1970s disco boom. Derided by rock critics for its lack of serious content, disco had a distinct utopian element. In disco the intensity of pleasure on the dancefloor was reimagined as an ideal for living rather than just a Saturday night release. The implicit fantasy was of a "Boogie Wonderland" where music, dancing and sex were organising principles, rather than work and the economy. "Lost in music, feel so alive, I quit my nine to five" as Sister Sledge put it.

In the unpromising social climate of the 1970s, this wonderland was sometimes projected into space. Earth, Wind and Fire (who recorded Boogie Wonderland) combined elements of Egyptology and sci-fi with albums like "Head for the Sky" (1973) and "All n All" (1977) with its cover pic of a rocket taking off from a pyramid. In the late 1970s there was a rash of space themed disco hits like Sheila B. Devotion's "Spacer" and Slick's "(Everybody goes to the)

Space base" (1979), the latter imagining the space base as disco and social centre rather than military-industrial installation.

Some of these space records can be viewed as simple cash-ins on the popularity of Star Wars and similar films of this period, but was there something deeper going on? While the sale of disco records reaped big profits for the record companies, the logic of the dancefloor was potentially at odds with the society of domination. On the floor pleasure was elevated above the puritan work ethic and hierarchies of class, race, gender and sexuality were (sometimes) dissolved.

Discos (like today's dance spaces) could have been the launchpad for explorations of different worlds on earth and beyond, powered by the Dance Disco Heat energy generated on the floor. In this light the disco icon par excellence, the glittering mirror ball, has to be reevaluated. Detailed archaeological investigations of the alignment of these spheres of light suspended high above the dancefloor will doubtless reveal that they were installed to equip dancers with a rudimentary astronomical knowledge to help them find their way around the universe.



Now Abuse Some Animals - protest against plans to send monkeys into space as part of the Bion Programme, 1996

They never reached the moon!

The Apollo 'moon landings' between 1969 and 1972 are presented by NASA as the highest point of the space programme, and as a model for all future adventures. In reality nothing better demonstrates why it is unfit to explore anything more exciting than the inside of the Science Museum.

A favourite question for conspiracy theorists worldwide is whether the moon landings actually happened or whether the whole thing was faked in a TV studio like in the film *Capricorn One*. If we give NASA the benefit of the doubt and allow that it may have sent a rocket somewhere it is clear that they never reached the moon, or at least not the moon as it has been known through the ages.

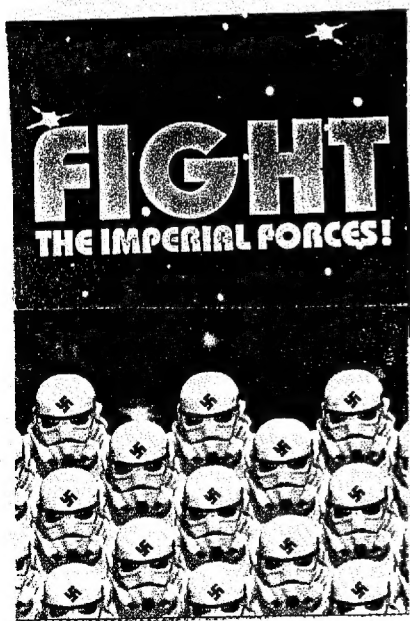
This was not the moon of heretics, pagans, lovers or night time revellers. The moon of tides, madness, goddesses, rituals of drink, drugs and dancing. Neil Armstrong and his mates did not have the imagination for the kind of space travel needed to reach this moon. All they were able to reach was a lump of rock somewhere - possibly in orbit, possibly in New Mexico somewhere.

How did they mark the momentous occasion of the first landing on July 21 1969? The first thing they did was plant an American flag like it was just another piece of imperial real estate. By 1969 there were very few places left in the world where it was safe to do so. Losing the war in Vietnam and with flags burning everywhere else, perhaps the whole space programme

was an attempt to find a place where the Stars and Stripes could fly unmolested.

The Apollo 14 'moonlanding' in 1971 witnessed another amazing leap of fantasy and imagination when Alan Shepard became the world's first lunar golfer. Billions of pounds and years of effort culminated in the staging of the first lunar open. All over the world, people are being uprooted and ecosystems bulldozed to build golf courses, sanitised homogenous outdoor playgrounds for the rich. Judging by the Apollo programme a similar fate awaits the whole universe if NASA have their way.

The Apollo programme shows that no matter how many miles NASA nauts may travel they will never get anywhere because in their heads they will still be in the suburbs of white middle class america, travelling across the universe opening golf courses and fly-through Macdonalds.



My day in Space

"I wanted to dance as I had never yet danced: I wanted to dance beyond all heavens" (Nietzsche, Thus Spake Zarathustra)

In the summer of 1995 I had the pleasure of spending a day in Space. Thousands of people from all over the world have journeyed to Space in recent years. This legendary dance club in Ibiza provides an excellent illustration of the possibilities and limitations of dance cultures as a means of leaving this world behind.

Clubs in Britain tend to be confined indoors at night. Space turns this on its head, opening in the day and with an outside dancefloor. We turned up at about 11 am after a very pleasant breakfast of coffee, croissants and speed. Some people had come straight from a hard night's dancing elsewhere, many of them crashed out on cushions in the corner or on whicker chairs on the outside terrace. Much of Ibiza is Brit-dominated, but here there was a better mix of nationalities and sexualities than on the Starship Enterprise.

The ceiling inside the dark interior of the club is decorated with stars - a map of our destination? Further evidence of the club's potential is found on the edge of the outside dancefloor, where there are several giant propellers. People danced in front of them to keep cool, but there is little doubt that as well functioning as air conditioning fans these machines could be used as starting motors to help propel Space into space.

The music was wall to wall anthems, like Todd Terry's Weekend and, the Hardfloor remix of Mory Kante's Yeke Yeke. The atmosphere never reached fever pitch, but there was an intimation of *that* feeling - the disordering of the senses, waves of noise and light flowing over and through the body... That feeling in the centre of the floor, where the outside world has already been left behind and it is easy to believe that the whole place could take off and never come back.

In view of this potential it is not surprising that the state takes various measures to contain dancing and prevent us reaching the stars.

In many countries only approved businessmen get permission to run clubs. The high prices they charge - some clubs in Ibiza charge £30 a ticket, with small bottles of water costing £3 a bottle in Space - effectively rations dancing, limiting the amount of time people spend dancing, and the amount of people dancing at any one time. The hours people can dance are confined, by rules which state that clubs have to shut at particular times. Within the clubs enemy agents patrol to sabotage preparations for flight - in Space the security wore police style uniforms and patrolled with truncheons.

Above all great efforts have been expended to prevent people dancing under the stars themselves, the ideal conditions for spaceflight. In the UK it is virtually impossible to get official permission to dance outside at night, and non-commercial parties have been targeted by legislation such as the Criminal Justice Act.

Ibiza is different to Britain in that people can and do dance all day and all night (if they can afford it), and the normal relations of night, day, work and play are suspended. But this is confined as a temporary holiday experience, which most people only experience for a week or two.

All this prevents the energy generated on the dancefloor from reaching the critical mass necessary for space flight, as well as preventing a terminal drain of the energy needed to sustain the global system of profit, production and domination.

It was for this reason that on this occasion Space failed to take off and on leaving the club we found ourselves wandering down a beautiful beach in the sun rather than walking on the moon. Still it definitely beat the Holloway Road at 4 am...

Disconaut AAA

AAA was launched in April 1995 as a non-hierarchical network of local, community-based space exploration programmes. Here Comes Everybody!, the first annual report of the AAA, details some of the activities of the many AAA groups worldwide (available for £2.50 from Inner City AAA, BM Jed, London WC1N 3XX).

Disconaut AAA (c/o Practical History, 121 Railton Rd, London SE24) will be focusing on developing the potential of dance cultures for the exploration of space. Everybody is a star! is named after a 1979 track by Sylvester (1946-1988), also responsible for such otherworld explorations as "Dance Disco Heat", "Do you wanna funk" and "You make me feel mighty real".